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**In CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.**

**The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,**

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| 1. When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. | The declaration opens by saying declaring independence is a serious step. It requires Americans to explain why they are taking this step. The introduction also refers to the laws of nature and nature’s God. The declaration is based on the belief that all people have natural rights. |
| 2. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. -- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, -- That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. | The second part of the declaration is the most famous. It argues that people have the right to change a government when it abuses their rights. This part sets out important ideas about government. It says that “all men are created equal.” And they have “unalienable rights,” rights that no one may take away. These rights are “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” It says that governments are set up to protect these rights. And that governments get “their just powers from the consent of the governed.” In other words, the people run the government. The goal of government should be to guard everyone’s freedom. The purpose of government is not to serve the rulers. It is to serve the people and uphold their rights. |
| 3. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. | This part of the declaration closes by saying that overthrowing a government is a serious matter. It should only be done for serious reasons. But when people have endured many abuses for a long time, it is their duty to overthrow the government and set up a better one. |
| 4. Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world. | The colonists find themselves in this situation. The British king has repeatedly inflicted injuries on the American colonists. |
| 5. He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. | He did not approve laws passed by colonial legislatures. |
| 6. He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them. | He required royal governors to suspend laws passed by colonial legislatures until he approved them, and he has ignored these laws. |
| 7. He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only. | He ordered that new towns not be set up unless they give away their right to have representatives in the colonial legislature. |
| 8. He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures. | He has forced colonial legislatures to meet at faraway places to tire legislators out and make them pass laws he wants. |
| 9. He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people. | He has closed down colonial legislatures when they have objected to his denying colonists their rights. |
| 10. He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within. | When he closed down the colonial legislatures, the legislators tried to meet on their own, but the king’s officials tried to stop them. This left the colonies without a legal government. |
| 11. He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands. | He has tried to keep the colonies from expanding into new lands and to prevent new colonists from coming to America. |
| 12. He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers. | He prevented courts from being set up in some colonies. |
| 13. He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries. | He made sure judges were not independent. Instead the king could dismiss them at any time and set their salaries. |
| 14. He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance. | He has created many new offices to collect taxes, and tax collectors have hounded Americans. |
| 15. He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures. | He has put the British military in charge of some colonies. |
| 16. He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:  For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:  For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:  For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:  For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:  For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:  For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences | He has approved illegal laws passed by Parliament, such as:  Forcing colonists to house and pay for British troops. (Quartering Act of 1774)  Protecting British troops and officials from being tried in colonial courts. (Administration of Justice Act of 1774  Taxing Americans without their consent (taxation without representation). (Stamp Act of 1765, Townshend Revenue Act of 1767)  Denying colonists the right of trial by jury (this was done in customs cases).  Trying colonists in Britain for certain offenses |
| 17. For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:  For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:  For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever. | Extending the borders of Canada into land claimed by colonies. (Quebec Act of 1774)  Taking away elected governments (Massachusetts Government Act of 1774)  Assuming the power to make whatever laws it wants for the colonies. (Declaratory Act of 1766) |
| 18. He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us. | He has waged war against the colonies. (Proclamation of Rebellion of 1775) |
| 19. He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation. | He is sending large armies of paid foreigners to continue the killing and tyranny. He is not fit to rule. |
| 20. He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands. | He has forced Americans captured at sea to join the British navy and fight against their fellow Americans. |
| 21. He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions. | He has provoked uprisings and tried to get Indians to attack colonists. |
| 22. In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people. | This part of the declaration makes clear that Americans are not acting rashly in declaring their independence. It explains that over and over again they petitioned the king to make changes. The king ignored the petitions. The declaration repeats the charge that the king is unfit to rule a free people. |
| 23. Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends. | The declaration also notes that Americans appealed to the British people. But all these appeals fell on deaf ears. Therefore, the only option is for Americans to declare their independence. |
| 24. We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor. | The declaration concludes by declaring the United States’ complete break from the king and Britain. It claims the power of every independent country, such as waging war, making peace treaties, and trading with other countries. It ends by saying Americans depend on God’s protection and are willing to risk their lives, fortunes, and honor to be free of Britain. They indeed risked everything because Britain considered them traitors, but they considered freedom worth the sacrifice. |